HOLLYWOOD SUPERSTARS 2

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EPIC COMICS®

Mark Evanier and Dan Spiegle

HOLLYWOOD SUPERSTARS

IT'S NO JOKE FOR FUNNYMAN LEO HANEY WHEN HE'S...

CAUGHT IN LOVE'S LETHAL EMBRACE!

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Hello. I'm probably still *Mark Evanier.* Here on Hollywood Boulevard, the Chamber of Commerce embeds the names of stars in the sidewalk. They pick the stars based on their fame, their contribution to the Arts and especially on their studio's willingness to cough up three grand to promote the star's newest movie. But here you can find the names of the greats. **John Wayne...Marilyn Monroe...Maurice Diller...***(Huh? Who, you ask, is Maurice Diller? No one knows but he's got a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. The best guess is that someone made a typo and meant to honor Mauritz Stiller, who directed Greta Garbo's first films.)* The Boulevard may have meant **glamour** once upon a time but, today, there ain't a lot of **that**...just cheap souvenir shops, poster emporiums, Scientology headquarters, the world's gaudiest McDonald's and a lot of disappointed tourists going, "**This** is Hollywood?" Of course, it is. And, of course, it **isn't.** Hollywood, after all, isn't a **place.** It's a state of mind...one that has always fascinated me. That's what this comic is all about. It may not be as much fun as a **real** trip to Hollywood but, hey, it's a lot safer. And you don't even have to watch where you walk!

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Dear Walter,
I'm sorry that I cannot be what you want me to be.
Perhaps it would be better if we didn't see each other anymore.
I'll never forget
TRASH
BAR

CUMS
EER

SEXIE
BAD GIRLS
NUDE NEWS

RACY

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HE WAS THE FOURTH MURDER! THAT'S FOUR GUYS DEAD AND THE POLICE AIN'T GOT CLUE ONE.
THE POLICE IN THIS TOWN COULDN'T SOLVE AN A.P.B. FOR KING KONG.
TAKE AWAY THE L.A.P.D. DISCOUNTS AT THE SIZZLER SALAD BAR. THEN, YOU'LL SEE SOME ACTION--!
Dear Mom,
Everything is great here in California. I've made a lot of good friends here, especially a man named Jerry Naylor who I think you'd like a lot. He was a stuntman but he gave it up a few years ago when he decided that no movie was worth someone's life. He went into the personal investigations business (you know, a private eye like on TV) and does a lot of work for the studios. He has a partner named Leo who is very funny but he always seems kind of lonely. I wish I could find him a girl friend.
I am sorry to hear that Roger is so upset about my leaving Muncie. I know he never liked the whole idea of California and was always praying an earthquake would destroy it someday.
I have to run off to an audition now. I'll call soon.
DAVE'S DONUTS
NUTS

Monique

by Mark EVANIER and DAN SPIEGLE

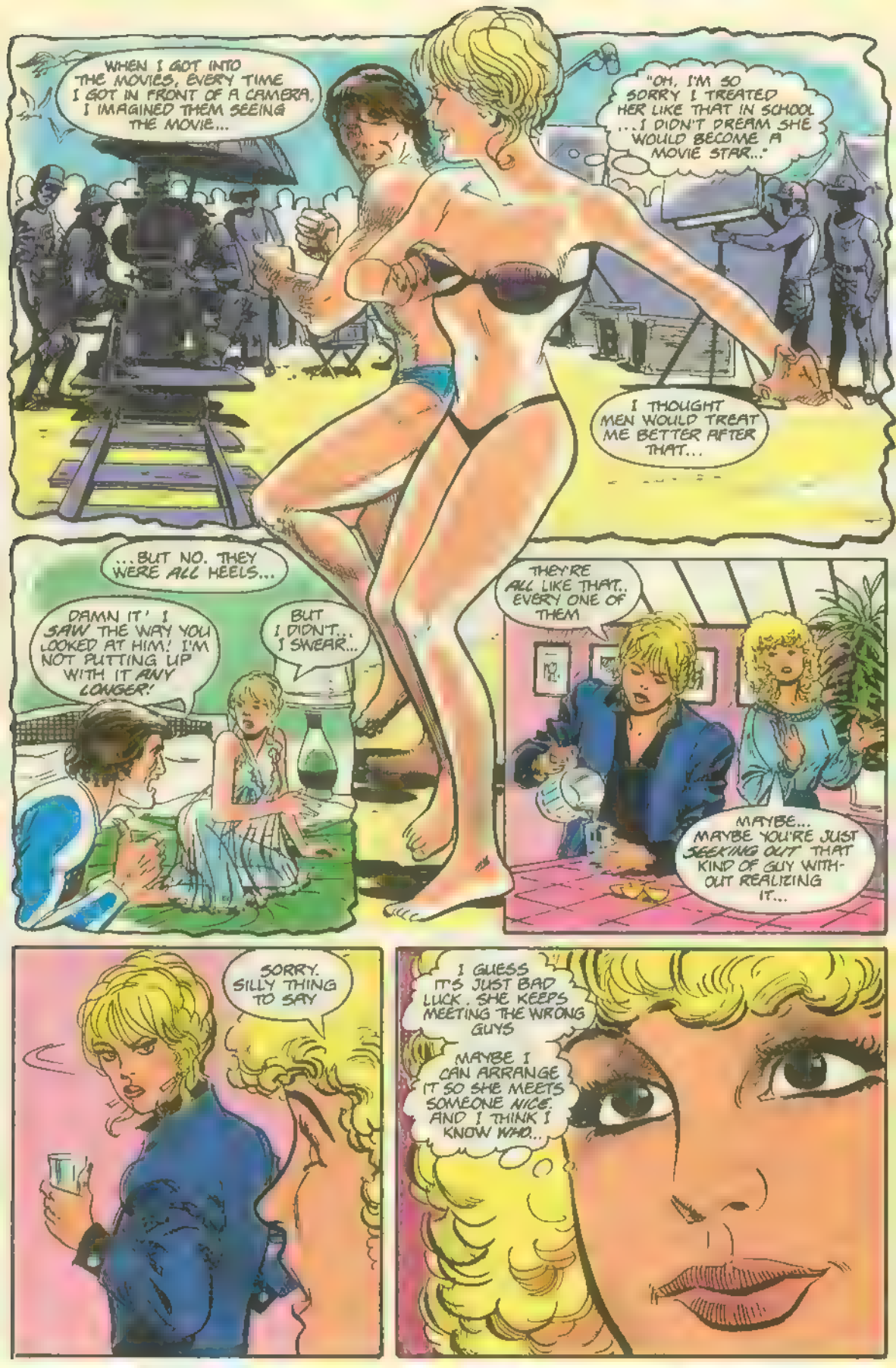
WHY ARE YOU SO INTERESTED IN THIS, ANYWAY?
ALL FOUR VICTIMS WERE OVERWEIGHT, LONELY, AND LIVED THROUGH FANTASY LIVES.
SO?
NEVER MIND.
MELODY, I'D LIKE YOU TO RETYPE MY JOKE FILE.
IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE TODAY, DOES IT? I HAVE AN AUDITION AT ONE O'CLOCK.
MATTER OF FACT, I'VE GOT TO START GETTING READY.
THEY'RE LOOKING FOR A MERYL STREEP TYPE. WONDER IF I HAVE TIME TO GET MY NOSE UNFIXED--!
THIS NOTEBOOK CONTAINS EVERY JOKE I'VE EVER TOLD ON STAGE.
YOU MEAN YOU HAVE BOTH JOKES IN THERE--?
SORRY. BEEN HANGING AROUND YOU TOO MUCH.
I KNOW. IT'S SO ANNOYING TO REALIZE I'M THAT ANNOYING.

THE WORST PART OF ACTING IS WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO BEFORE THEY LET YOU ACT...
STAGE 12
GEE. HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE WAITING TO AUDITION?
I DUNNO. HOW MANY ARE IN THE SCREEN ACTORS GUILD? LET ME HAVE A LOOK AT YOUR RESUME, HON.
HMMM...A LITTLE BALD ON CREDITS, ISN'T IT? MAYBE YOU'D BETTER WRITE SOMETHING ELSE IN.
YOU MEAN, MAKE SOMETHING UP? ISN'T THAT WRONG? WHAT IF SOMEONE FINDS OUT?
THEY EXPECT A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF LYING ON A RESUME, HON. PUT DOWN THAT YOU WERE IN "CONTRABAND."
WHO'LL KNOW?
OKAY. "CONTRABAND." GOOD MOVIE.
FINALLY...
SORRY TO KEEP YOU WAITING. I'M HARRY LUCAS. I'M THE DIRECTOR.
PLEASED TO MEET YOU. I KNOW I'VE SEEN A LOT OF YOUR FILMS BUT I'M TOO NERVOUS TO REMEMBER WHICH ONE...
YOU PROBABLY SAW MY FILM, "CONTRABAND."
EVENTUALLY...
I WAS TERRIBLE! I STINK! I WAS AWFUL!
I'M SORRY BUT MR. LUCAS IS BOOKED SOLID.
BUT YOU MUST LET ME AUDITION!

I'M A WOMAN LIKE YOU, DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND? WE HAVE TO STICK TOGETHER IN THIS BUSINESS--!
I WAS DREADFUL!
I WAS HORRIBLE AND I STUNK AND NOW MY CAR WON'T START! WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH IT?
OH.
OH, GOD. WHY DO THESE THINGS HAPPEN TO ME? I CAN'T AFFORD FOUR NEW TIRES?
CAN I GIVE YOU A LIFT? SURE LOOKS LIKE YOU NEED ONE.
THANKS. I FEEL LIKE I OUGHTA PACK IT IN AND GO BACK HOME TO MUNCIE.
I'VE HAD THAT FEELING... AND I'M NOT EVEN FROM MUNCIE.

HER NAME WAS MONIQUE SPENSER AND SHE'D BEEN ACTING FOR TWELVE YEARS NOW. .
I DIDN'T NEED THIS TODAY. I WONDER WHO DID IT.
MEN, UNDOUBTEDLY. YOU CAN CALL FROM MY APARTMENT. IT'S JUST UP THE STREET HERE...
SHE HAD A LONG RESUME AND EVERYTHING ON IT WAS TRUE...
THAT'S RIGHT. ALL FOUR TIRES! I'LL GIVE YOU THE ADDRESS HERE AND YOU CAN PICK ME UP.
COULD YOU ASK JERRY IF I CAN HAVE AN ADVANCE ON MY SALARY?
MELODY NEEDS-
WHATEVER IT IS, THE ANSWER IS NO. OUR CHECKING ACCOUNT'S FLATTER THAN A SNAIL ON THE FREEWAY.
SHE'S YOUNG. SHE STILL THINKS MEN WILL BE THERE FOR YOU WHEN YOU NEED THEM...
SHE'S IN FOR SOME RUDE AWAKENINGS. MAYBE I CAN WARN HER A LITTLE...
FOUR GUYS RUN THROUGH A VEG-O-MATIC LIKE THAT--! GOTTA BE SOME SORT OF CONNECTION OR SOMETHING...
YOU GOT ANY THEORIES, LEO?
LEO?
THE KID'S HEAD OVER HEELS IN LUST. DON'T KNOW HOW IT'S GONNA TURN OUT, BUT IT WON'T BE PRETTY--!

YOU'VE BEEN IN HOW MANY MOVIES? I'M STILL TRYING TO GET IN FRONT OF A CAMERA.
EIGHT. AND IT'S NOT ALL IT'S CRACKED UP TO BE, BELIEVE ME.
I THOUGHT IT WOULD CHANGE MY LIFE...MAKE GUYS TREAT ME BETTER. THEY STILL TREAT ME LIKE AN UGLY LITTLE KID..
YOU? BUT...BUT YOU'RE BEAUTIFUL!
I WAS AN UGLY KID. AND YOU KNOW HOW CRUEL BOYS CAN BE...
HEY, PIGGO! IS IT TRUE YOU HAVE YOUR OWN ZIP CODE?
STAY OFF THE BEACH! CAP'N AHAB MIGHT GET YOU!
YOU PROBABLY NEVER EXPERIENCED THAT KIND OF HURT...
I SWORE THEN AND THERE, THEY'D REGRET MAKING MY LIFE HELL LIKE THAT. I WORKED ON MYSELF...
EXERCISE, PLASTIC SURGERY, LIPOSUCTION, COSMETOLOGY ...I HAD EVERYTHING DONE...


WHEN I GOT INTO THE MOVIES, EVERY TIME I GOT IN FRONT OF A CAMERA, I IMAGINED THEM SEEING THE MOVIE...
"OH, I'M SO SORRY I TREATED HER LIKE THAT IN SCHOOL ...I DIDN'T DREAM SHE WOULD BECOME A MOVIE STAR..."
I THOUGHT MEN WOULD TREAT ME BETTER AFTER THAT...
...BUT NO. THEY WERE ALL HEELS...
DAMN IT' I SAW THE WAY YOU LOOKED AT HIM! I'M NOT PUTTING UP WITH IT ANY LONGER!
BUT I DIDN'T... I SWEAR...
THEY'RE ALL LIKE THAT.. EVERY ONE OF THEM
MAYBE... MAYBE YOU'RE JUST SEEKING OUT THAT KIND OF GUY WITHOUT REALIZING IT...
SORRY. SILLY THING TO SAY
I GUESS IT'S JUST BAD LUCK. SHE KEEPS MEETING THE WRONG GUYS
MAYBE I CAN ARRANGE IT SO SHE MEETS SOMEONE NICE. AND I THINK I KNOW WHO...

AND SO IT WAS THAT...
MONIQUE, THIS IS MY GOOD FRIEND, LEO HANEY. LEO, THIS IS...
THE STAR OF "BEACH PARTY MASSACRE" AND "MURDER ACADEMY II!"
D-DID YOU LOOK ME UP IN THE ACADEMY LIBRARY?
MADAME, I AM THE ACADEMY LIBRARY. I USED TO HUSTLE TRIVIAL PURSUIT FOR BIG BUCKS.
BE NICE AND I WON'T TELL YOU I SAW "HACKER SQUADRON."
SHE LIKES HIM. THIS'LL SHOW HER THERE ARE NICE GUYS IN THE WORLD...
...AND LEO HAS ALWAYS LOOKED LIKE HE COULD USE A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN IN HIS LIFE.
IN THE MEANTIME, NAYLOR HAD GOTTEN A CALL...
THIS IS ABOUT THOSE FOUR GUYS WHO WERE MURDERED, LIEUTENANT?
UH-HUH. YOU'LL SEE IN A MOMENT WHY I SENT FOR YOU, JERRY. BUT FIRST, I HAVE TO SWEAR YOU TO SECRECY...
WILD MULES COULDN'T GET IT OUTTA ME.
ALL FOUR BODIES WERE FOUND BATHED IN BLOOD. AND IT WAS ALL THE SAME TYPE BLOOD. TAKE A LOOK..
"BLOOD TYPE: CORN SYRUP?"

THAT'S STAGE BLOOD.. THE KIND WE USE IN MOVIES.
THE MURDERER APPARENTLY DIDN'T THINK THE MURDERS WERE "BLOODY" ENOUGH SO SHE ADDED SOME...
FOR PICTURE TAKING. WE FOUND [redacted] WRAPPERS.
"SHE?"
YEAH. TRACES OF MENSTRUAL BLOOD AT EACH SITE... AND MURDERS ALMOST THIRTY DAYS APART
SHE'S ABOUT DUE AGAIN... LIKE TONIGHT!
YOU KNOW SPECIAL EFFECTS. HOW MANY PLACES IN TOWN SELL THAT STUFF?
I NEED A LIST. I'LL HAVE MY MEN CHECK EACH ONE OUT... CHECK FOR WOMEN BUYING THE STUFF
THERE ARE A LOT OF PLACES... PROP HOUSES, SOME MAKE-UP PLACES.
I'VE GOT LOTS OF MEN BUT NOT A LOT OF TIME.
LT. GRESHAM SENT HIS MEN OFF TO ALL THE OUTLETS ON NAYLOR'S LIST BUT...
I FORGOT TO PUT DOWN COSMIC COSMETICS, THEY CARRY STAGE BLOOD...
MIGHT AS WELL CHECK 'EM OUT MYSELF.

COSMIC COSMETICS SOLD MAINLY TO THE TRADE...

HOWIE? YOU HERE, HOWIE? IT'S ME--JERRY NAYLOR!

NAYLOR...

HELP ME, JERRY...HELP ME...

HEY, IT'S JUST *MAKE-UP*, JERRY.

DON'T TELL ME YOU FELL FOR IT. *YOU?* KING OF THE STUNT-MEN?

I'M AFRAID I'VE LOST MY TUMMY FOR THIS KINDA THING, HOWIE.

AW, *COME ON!* WAIT'LL YOU SEE THIS NEW EFFECT I GOT--MAKES IT LOOK LIKE YOUR BRAIN'S OOZING OUT YOUR EARS...

I THINK I CAN LIVE WITHOUT THAT JUST NOW, HOWIE. I NEED SOME INFO...

LEO HANEY HAD ALWAYS HAD A DREAM, NOT UNCOMMON...

SEE YOU AT EIGHT, LEO!

I'LL BE HERE!

I'M SO HAPPY YOU AND MONIQUE HIT IT OFF...

ME--LEO HANEY--HAVING DINNER WITH A BEAUTIFUL MOVIE STAR...SORTA...

SHE NEEDS SOMEONE WHO WILL *RESPECT* HER... *CARE* ABOUT HER...

I'LL GET HER ALONE...TURN DOWN THE LIGHTS...

SHE'S BEEN IN SO MANY MOVIES... I WISH I COULD BE LIKE *HER*...

JUST AFTER SUNDOWN...

WONDER IF ANYONE I KNOW WILL SEE ME WITH HER, I HOPE--!

THESE ARE THE ONLY CUSTOMERS HE HAD FOR THE STUFF THE LAST SIX MONTHS... MOSTLY STUDIOS YOU NEED TO CHECK...

THE ONLY FEMALE CUSTOMER WE'VE FOUND SO FAR WE CAN'T LOCATE IS NAMED ETHEL ROTBLATT. WE'RE STILL LOOKING.

THANKS A LOT, NAYLOR. THAT'S ONE I OWE YOU.

LEO, YOU EVER HEAR OF AN "ETHEL ROTBLATT?"

NOPE. HEY, CAN I USE THE PHONE? I HAVE TO CALL MONIQUE. DID I TELL YOU I'M GOING OUT WITH MONIQUE SPENSER?

ONLY FIFTEEN TIMES.

I'M CALLING HER TO SEE WHERE SHE WANTS TO HAVE DINNER.

MONIQUE? LEO. WHAT'S IT GONNA BE TONIGHT? SURF OR TURF?
I CAN'T BELIEVE I SAID THAT.
I'M DIETING. I GAINED THREE OUNCES THIS WEEK. WHY DON'T YOU JUST COME UP?
OH, THIS BATHTUB IS WONDERFUL. WHAT A SHAME TO HAVE TO GET OUT AND PUT ON CLOTHES...
JUST COME ON OVER, LEO. LEO?
THIS IS THE PEAK EXPERIENCE OF MY LIFE.
WE MAY HAVE TO HOSE LEO DOWN WITH CRACKED ICE.
I THINK HE AND MONIQUE WILL MAKE A LOVELY COUPLE.
I'M GOING OFF ON MY DATE. IF I'M NOT BACK IN THIRTY DAYS, SEND THE MARINES AFTER ME.
LEO, I HATE TO BRING THIS UP BUT YOU'VE BEEN FOLLOWING THIS SLASHER THING...
YOU THINK MONIQUE MIGHT BE...?
COME ON, JER! THIS IS A GODDESS, NOT A MURDERESS! I APPRECIATE YOUR CONCERN BUT...
OKAY, JUST THOUGHT I'D MENTION IT IS ALL.

OH, MEL—YOU WANTED TO READ UP ON MONIQUE'S CAREER? I THINK THIS BOOK'S GOT SOME STUFF ON HER
GIVE IT BACK TOMORROW. I HAVEN'T READ IT YET.
THANKS. AND HAVE A GREAT TIME.

"WHAT IS WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?" ANSWER: EVERYTHING. LEO HANEY DOES NOT BELONG WITH A WOMAN LIKE THAT.
KNOCK IT OFF. RELAX AND RING THE BELL.
I'M GOING TO GO HOME AND WATCH TAPES ALL NIGHT.
LEO! WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
UHHH... I LEFT SOMETHING IN MY CAR...
FLOWERS! I BROUGHT YOU FLOWERS BUT I LEFT THEM IN MY CAR--!
OH, LOOK! HERE THEY WERE IN MY HAND, ALL ALONG!
YOU'RE SO CLEVER... SO FUNNY..
I THINK WE'RE GOING TO BE REAL CLOSE FRIENDS, LEO.
"CLOSE?" HOW CLOSE? CLOSER THAN THIS?
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JERRY HAD TAKEN MELODY TO GREASE-BURGER--AN ONLY SLIGHTLY SAFER PASTIME...

MY MOM KEEPS CALLING ME, SAYING, "I DON'T SEE YOU ON TV THIS WEEK, MELODY. WHAT'S WRONG?"

ACTUALLY, SHE CALLS ME PATRICIA. I CHANGED MY NAME AND SHE'S STEAMED ABOUT THAT, TOO.

UM-HUM...

IF I DON'T GET A PART IN SOMETHING SOON...

MELODY! THAT BOOK LEO GAVE YOU ABOUT HIS DATE--WHERE IS IT?

BACK AT THE OFFICE.

JERRY! I'M NOT FINISHED YET!

YOU JUST GAVE ME A THOUGHT! I HAVE TO FIND OUT WHAT HER REAL NAME IS!

LIKE I SAID, I'VE SEEN EVERY MOVIE YOU EVER MADE.

EVERY ONE, LEO? DO YOU LIKE THE WAY I LOOK, LEO?

OH, ONLY BECAUSE I'M MALE AND BREATHING...

ALTHOUGH I KNOW A FEW CORPSES YOU COULD AROUSE...

YOU WOULDN'T LIKE ME IF I WERE HOMELY... YOU WOULDN'T BE HERE...

YOU? "HOMELY?" MONIQUE, YOU'RE BEAUTIFUL!

I'M REALLY NOT. WHEN YOU LOOK CLOSER, YOU'LL SEE IT.

AND THEN YOU'LL HATE ME LIKE THE REST OF THEM...

ReadComicOn

HERE IT IS. MONIQUE SPENSER'S REAL NAME IS ETHEL ROTBLATT.
JESUS H. CHRIST...
WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME?
MY BEDROOM, OF COURSE!
UHH...
THINK, MELODY! YOU MUST REMEMBER HER ADDRESS!
THEY MAY WIND UP AT LEO'S APARTMENT BUT WE CAN'T TAKE THAT CHANCE!
I CAN'T REMEMBER! IT WAS OVER ON WILSHIRE... OR MAYBE SANTA MONICA...
YOU STAY THERE. I WANT TO SLIP INTO SOMETHING NICER FOR YOU...
THIS IS NOT HAPPENING TO ME.
I KEEP TELLING YOU-- I CAN'T REMEMBER WHERE SHE LIVES! I HAVEN'T LIVED HERE LONG ENOUGH!
YOU HAVE TO! LEO'S LIFE DEPENDS ON IT! THINK!
I'M SORRY, I'M SORRY! I CAN'T! IT WAS IN WESTWOOD SOMEWHERE--!

...THEN I'LL WIN THE LOTTO... THEN I'LL GET EDDIE MURPHY'S CAREER... SURE, WHY NOT? THEN...
JUST ONE MORE MINUTE, MY LOVE...
WHO ARE YOU CALLING?
LEO CALLED HER FROM THIS PHONE. I'M PUSHING THE LAST NUMBER REDIAL BUTTON-!
YOU THINK I AM BEAUTIFUL, LEO? YOU THINK I AM THE KIND OF GIRL YOU DREAM ABOUT?
~NOT THE KIND OF GIRL YOU USED TO MAKE FUN OF, BACK AT SCHOOL~?
N-N-NO... I MEAN, YES. I MEAN...
RRING
EXCUSE ME A SECOND, MY DEAR...
HELLO?
NOW, WHAT DO I DO? IF ONLY LEO WERE HERE. HE'S THE ONE WITH THE TRICKY MIND...

NO ONE WILL EVER BELIEVE THIS, BUT I'LL TELL THEM ANYWAY...
HELLO? IS ANYONE THERE?
MS. SPENCER? THIS IS TED AT KAYPAR STUDIOS. I HAVE A SCRIPT TO DELIVER TO YOU.. A FILM SIDNEY LUMET WANTS TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT...
COULD I GET THAT ADDRESS?
10418 WILSHIRE, APARTMENT 408.
THANKS.
LEO! YOU STILL HAVE YOUR CLOTHES ON! DON'T YOU LIKE ME?
YOU SAID YOU THOUGHT I WAS BEAUTIFUL...
OH! TIME FOR THAT?
JERRY, YOU'LL HAVE AN ACCIDENT!
I DROVE THIS WAY FOR STEVE McQUEEN! WE'VE GOTTA GET THERE FAST--!

THAT'S A LOVELY NEGLIGEE YOU'RE WEAR-
ER, WERE WEARING.
YOU'RE HAPPY NOW, LEO...YOU HAVE A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN BEFORE YOU... THIS IS WHAT YOU WANT ME TO BE...
YOU WOULDN'T WANT ME IF I WERE FAT AND HOMELY...
WELL, TAKE A GOOD LOOK, LEO. THIS IS WHAT YOU MADE ME BECOME...
MONIQUE, YOU'RE GOING TO THINK THIS IS CRAZY BUT...
COULD WE GO TO DINNER FIRST? TALK A BIT? I'D LIKE TO FIND OUT A LITTLE MORE ABOUT YOU FIRST...
WHAT?
LEO! LEO, ARE YOU IN HERE?
MONIQUE! HAVE YOU GONE CRAZY?
DON'T YOU LOVE ME, LEO?

DROP IT! LADY! DROP IT!
CALL LT. GRESHAM! THE NUMBER'S 555-5629! TELL HIM WE HAVE HIS KILLER!
"KILLER?" OH, MY GOD! RIGHT AWAY!
BY THE TIME THE POLICE ARRIVED, SHE'D CONFESSED TO ALL THE MURDERS... AS WELL AS SEVERAL VERY BAD MOVIES...
IT WAS WHEN I SAW MYSELF IN "HACKER SQUADRON"... SEEING MYSELF SLASHED LIKE THAT ON THE SCREEN...
...AND ALL THE PEOPLE IN THE AUDIENCE CHEERING LIKE THAT..CHEERING ME BEING HACKED UP...
I MADE MYSELF INTO SOMETHING THEY COULD LOVE...
WHY DIDN'T THEY LOVE ME?
I DON'T UNDERSTAND.
SHE DID A FULL REMODELING JOB ON HERSELF... REBUILT EVERYTHING FROM THE FOUNDATION UP.
YEAH. BUT SHE FORGOT TO CLEAN OUT THE ATTIC.

The End

SHOW BUSINESS

by Mark Evanier

Cartoons by Aragonés

Sergio Aragonés, who does the drawings that adorn these pages, and I have something in common: We have both auditioned to be TV weathermen.

I can't tell the tale of Sergio's experience as well as he can but, basically, in his earlier days, he thought a cartooning weatherperson might be just what the 6:00 News needed. So he wrangled a non-broadcast try-out and didn't get the job. Among the problems – actually, the *only* problem but a biggie — was that he didn't know the first thing about weather and had wrongly assumed that someone would supply all that data.

My experience was quite different. How I did not become the next Willard Scott, apart from the obvious lack of need for another Willard Scott, is the subject of this column.

It started with a strange interest in weather...not so strange when you consider that an awful lot of it was appearing in my living room. I was one year in my new house and, the first good rain we had, leaks happened. Lots of leaks. Rather than patch, I decided to replace and I selected a roofer...a move which shall henceforth be known as Mistake Number One. The roofer said he could roof me a whole new roof, complete with three-year warranty, for three thousand dollars. I forked over the bucks, he and his men spent a few days traipsing around overhead and I made the silly error of assuming that they had put a new roof on my abode.

Not so. They re-roofed some sections with what subsequently turned out to be sub-standard materials. They left other sections wholly untouched.

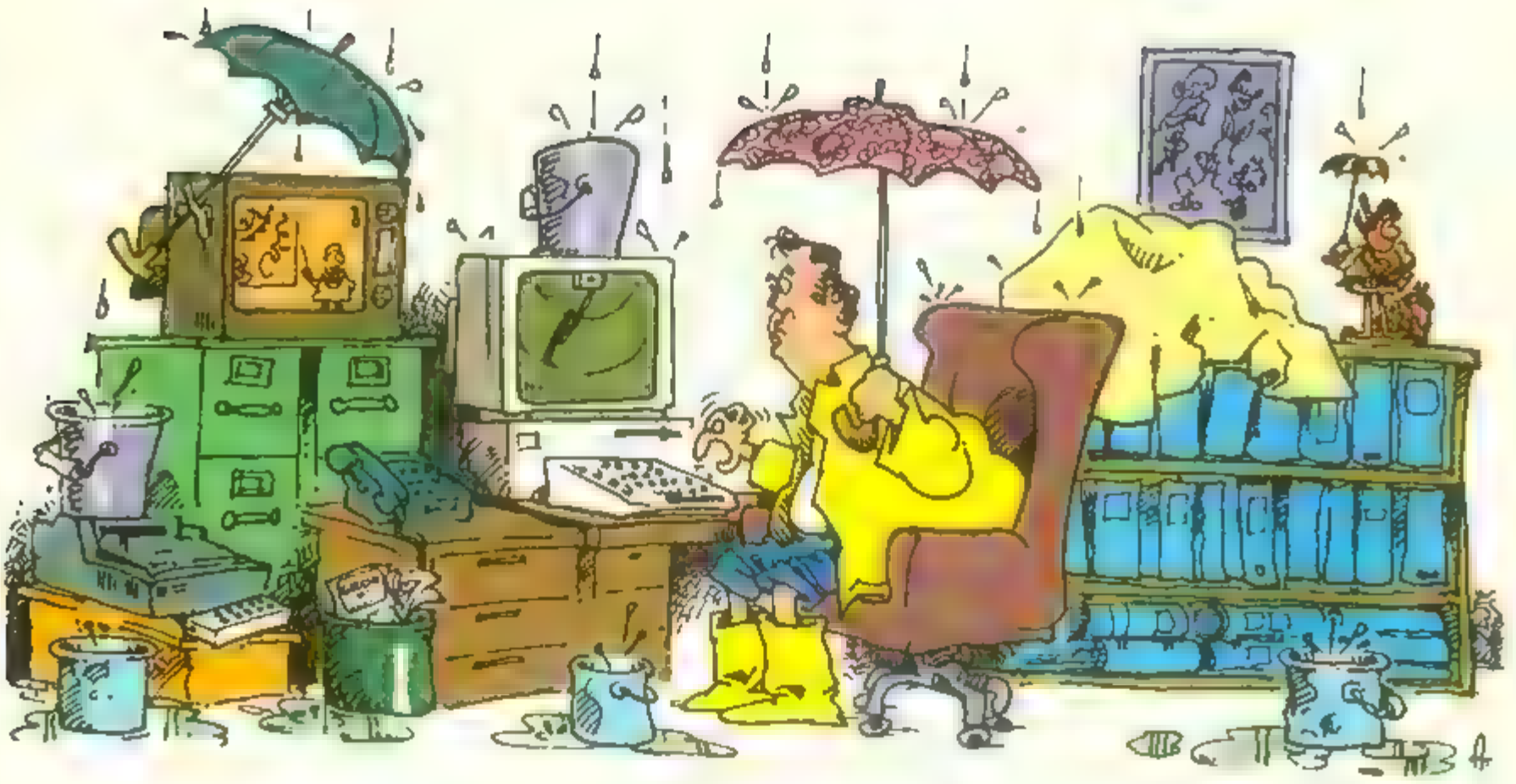
Now, I am a peace-loving person. I can count the number of times I have yelled on one hand and still have a finger left over for a rude gesture. I have struck exactly one person in my whole life and, believe me, he deserved it and everyone was amazed I didn't deck the guy weeks before. Still, in light of the problems this roofer created for me, I can't say for sure that I wouldn't have tried to kill him. But we'll never know for sure since the L.A. Police Department beat me to it.

When the full breadth of his damage became clear, I secured a lawyer and told him to go for blood. The very next day, I picked up the *Times* and found a headline: *POLICE SLAY CRAZED MAN*, dateline Whittier. A man had ingested enough drugs to be legally declared a Rexall store, chasing it all down with a trough of Jim Beam. In such a state, he had begun threatening his spouse with a ginsu knife and, when the police arrived, pointed it at them. An officer fired and that was how my roofer and three-year warranty expired. That I felt he got off easy should give you some idea of how much grief this man caused my life.

My attorney attempted to extract financial vengeance from his estate but had to report back that it was not unlike squeezing juice from a raisin. Mine was not the only roofing job that this man's firm had done with swiss cheese; ahead of me was a long line of claimants including the proprietors of a big department store and all those injured when the store's roof collapsed from a light drizzle.

But I'm way ahead of my misery here. The first time my "new" roof was subjected to precipitation, it sprung leaks in ten times as many spots as the old roof. Several destroyed my home's electrical system; others wrecked the heating equipment; still others caused my alarm to short. Walls buckled and cracked, paint bubbled and blistered. A procession of such roofers as could be roused from the Yellow Pages came by and tarred over each leak, as found. But each rain brought new leaks and new damage and new checks and new headaches.

I spent a lot of time listening to weather reports, trying to figure out when I might gain some respite from the destruction and/or get repairmen up there to tar further. I discovered that not all TV weatherfolks were created equal; that all of them took a nod from the National Weather Service and its forecasts but that, since they sometimes disagreed, they were obviously getting their predictions and data from diverse sources. I learned that at least one of our local weatherpeople had a great deal of trouble saying what he meant and often, in trying to make his segment interest-



ing, would make a weak approaching front sound like something that could cart Dorothy and a house off over the rainbow. When your health is starting to depend on whether or not there's a pending storm to worry about — and mine sure was — understanding weather hyperbole can be rather important.

I procured books and pamphlets on the subject of weather forecasting. I'm not sure why; I just became fascinated by it. Science was never my metier and I still have no idea how to calculate a temperature gradient. But I came to learn that forecasting the weather has an element of Judgment Call to it. At some point, all the satellites and computers and isobar charts yield very specific probabilities of certain patterns resulting. And some human being — who, alas, may be more schooled in occluded fronts than in communicative English — has to explain those probabilities in terms that Joe Schmuck can use to decide whether or not to wash the Buick. The TV weatherman is more Interpreter than Scientist: His job is explaining, not forecasting.. and some of them don't do it all that well, charming and well-dressed though they may be. I didn't learn all of this from the books and brochures. I had a good teacher.

During my ordeal, during the times when I could almost see rainbows after a storm *inside* my house, I came to rely on the forecasts of one local TV weatherman more than the others. He was simply more lucid, more precise and less prone to needlessly foreshadowing monsoons than the others.

As I have been writing this, he is on the local news and, figuring I oughta get his okay before I tell this story, I just called the station and caught him as he came off-camera. He said fine, tell the tale if you like, Mark...but I'd just as soon you didn't mention my name. Fine. I owe the guy that and more so, in these pages, he will be Hi Pressure.

What paid for all those roofing repairs I did was a job I had writing a TV series that month. We had a lot of Big Name guest stars on our show so our all-day tapings were often crowded with visitors from all over the studio. One afternoon, I noticed Hi watching us tape, probably killing time until he had to go do the 4:00 news on the same lot.

I couldn't resist. I walked over, introduced myself and told him most of what I just told you about my weather woes and how helpful I found him to be. He was genuinely moved by my gratitude and fascinated to ask me what I thought he was doing right or wrong.

Our discussion segued over to the basics of his job and, then, to mine. Whereupon a daily ritual began to emerge...

For the next few weeks of our taping, Mr. Pressure would amble over to our stage around 2:00 each day and he would explain to me all about the weather biz and I would explain to him all about how a comedy show gets taped and how stand-up comedians operate.

That was not as odd an interest for him as was the forecasting stuff for me. He was then under what he called "siege" from the News Director of his station. They thought his weather forecasts lacked a certain...sparkle. That he was the best in town at telling you how hot or wet it would be was immaterial: Where were the *jokes?* The station had called in a Media Consultant to juice up their newscasts and the gent was frontloading the news with "happy talk." Two older, veteran field reporters had been laid off and their salaries rerouted into hair and wardrobe makeovers

for the station's anchors.

In Los Angeles, forecasting the weather can be a boring watch: so much of the time, there isn't any. One can only say it's going to be seventy degrees with night and morning low clouds so many times, so many ways.

Of course, when the surf at Malibu is kicking up ten-foot breakers and taking expensive homes on trips to Catalina...or when it's a hundred and ten in the shade and there isn't any shade, a station is glad to have a resident weatherman and he needn't resort to much to make his spot interesting. But it isn't that way most of the time in L.A. And even with all the storms we'd had lately in the area and over my dinette set, Hi was getting nagged to make the weather more..."*interesting.*"

So I started giving him a hand. I'd give him a joke or two, some line to liven up his broadcasts. Sometimes, just before he went on, he'd steal over to our set with the copy that led into his segment and we'd work out a line or two he could do about the preceding subject to segue into the weather maps. In exchange, he gave me personalized weather info, along with phone and computer access codes with which I could (and can still) receive privileged weather data. Like, I can get the official forecast that one of the private weather services sells its clients and I can also read the forecasters' notes and chit-chat about how certain or uncertain they might be about what they're predicting.

I didn't tell any of my friends or co-workers about any of this. How do you tell people that you're ghost-writing the weather?

After I stopped working at that studio, I occasionally phoned Hi with a joke or a line to use (or some weather query) but our contacts petered out. One day, about a year after I'd first met him, he called me up and asked me if I had any interest in auditioning to be a TV weatherman. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. *Me?* As in, *Not Someone Else?* Impossible.

One of the reasons it was impossible is that, even had I ever had any interest in doing something of the sort, Los Angeles is a major, major TV market — probably *the* major market for this kind of thing. America abounds in local weatherguys and gals who would sell their parents to a glue factory for an audition at an L.A. station. You just don't get handed something like this, especially if you aren't seeking it.

And I sure wasn't. I long ago decided that I had about as much business on that side of the camera as I did conducting High Mass at the Vatican. This decision was reinforced one time when, as Head Writer on a variety show, I gave the okay to use the writers as bit players in one of the sketches, forgetting for the moment that "the writers" included me. Before I knew it, they had rented a costume and scheduled me for make-up and I was stuck doing the part.

You know how actors always say, "The first time I set foot on a stage, I knew that was where I belonged"? Well, getting up there in front of the cameras with Max Factor sponged all over my cheeks, caused me to think of nothing but: *"I don't belong here. I should be in the booth, watching all this on the monitor."* I turned down subsequent opportunities to "act" and, apart from sometimes doing the audience warm-up on a show I was writing, I have left the performing to professionals. Which is how it should be. While there are many humans on this planet who can write *and* perform, there are even more who have but one of those skills and think they have two. I have a good friend who is a terrific comedy writer and a lousy performer. He is occasionally able, when hired as the former, to inveigle his way into a role on the show. And if he isn't embarrassed beyond belief, he oughta be. Every time I see him on the screen, I take great pride in knowing at least some of the areas at which I stink.

So when Hi asked me if I wanted to audition, my immediate reaction was as if he had called to ask if I wanted to go a few rounds with James "Buster" Douglas. But he went on, urging I consider it.

He explained that his station needed a weekend weatherman — someone to do the Saturday/Sunday programs and to occasionally spell one of the weekday folks for a week. So it wasn't a full-time job, of which I already had one (writing), the only job for which I ever had the slightest interest or competence. And, Hi explained, they weren't looking for a graduate Meteorologist (like him). The News Director had hired a lady who had formerly booked stand-up comics for a talk show and sent her off to the Comedy Store, Improv and other clubs in search of someone who could take the wire data and present it with a light, witty touch.

Hi had protested, ever so politely, that that was no way to find a weatherman and the News Director had said, "If you know someone who can do the weather and make it interesting, we'll add him to the auditions."

So there it was: My chance. Hi told me I could do it; that he'd work with me as I had once worked with him; that it was only an audition, not a complete Change of Life. And he gave me a few days to consider it.

I considered it. Given the fact that I was already making a decent living and had no interest in advancing in this area, there was absolutely no reason for me to do it. None. And, to this day, I can't tell you why I agreed to the audition but for the fact that it was only an audition and I knew there was no possibility of it amounting to anything more than that. I did *not* think, "Gee, it might be fun to do the

weather on TV." I thought, "Gee, it might be fun to do the audition." Just the once.

One trick to being a TV weatherman is functioning in Chromakey. The fancy maps and satellite photos that most of them point to are not actually wall-sized; they are computer-generated graphics. If your local weatherperson is stepping in front of them and pointing out lows, he is probably added electronically to the picture; that is, he stands before a blue (or green) wall and gestures to the corresponding locale on the backdrop. Chromakey — or some brand-name version of it like Ultimatte — enables the Technical Director to drop out the blue (or green) and to superimpose everything else in the shot — *i.e.*, the weatherman — over another picture. Thus, your weatherman's image is superimposed over the computer-created map image and it looks like he's standing in front of it, casting a shadow on it, even. And when he points to a certain spot on the blue (or green) drop, it looks like he's pointing to a certain spot on the map.

There are, though, problems. First off, since the blue (or green) is extracted from the video image of the weatherman, he can't wear that color, whichever it is, on his person or he will appear transparent. Secondly, he has to keep his eye on a monitor to see the weather map at which he is supposedly gesturing. But that monitor isn't like a mirror: The image is not reversed. Left is left and right is right and nearly everyone who has ever tried it has, from a lifetime of looking in mirrors, gotten it all backwards at first.

Then there is the problem of time: All TV is based on the selling of time. It is television's most precious commodity. A TV newscast must be tight and it must be on time. You're on live and if you squander thirty seconds, that could be a whole 'nother news item that doesn't get told. For my audition, I was counseled that I would be expected to do fifteen seconds of friendly banter/segue with a newsperson, then a two-minute weathercast to also include a plug for some local and worthy charity event, then fifteen more seconds of conversation with the news anchor in which he or she would ask me some question about the forecast on which I would quickly elaborate. (On most newscasts, "the question" is planted; that is, the person in my position would tell the anchor what to ask me in supposed spontaneity. But since such conversation is often unplanned, interjected to fill gaps, my question for the test would not be prearranged.)

Hi's main words of advice were to make the two-minute weather section two minutes exactly. He knew I didn't really want the job but he said that if I *did*, a sensational way to not get it would be to let the weathercast run, say,

two minutes and six seconds. Since I had decided to play by the rules, I took that under careful advisement.

Hi worked with me a bit but the best thing he did for me was to set me up with a gent at the National Weather Service who would be on duty for me to phone just before my audition. This was one of the men who calculated the actual forecast and who probably knew more about weather than I could learn spending the rest of my life in intense cramming. The other auditioners would be scrambling about to assemble their forecasts from whatever data they could glom onto; I had the direct pipeline to The Man. That didn't necessarily give me much of an advantage, however,

since accuracy of prediction carried no seeming weight in this contest.

I practiced for a day or two at home. I have a six-foot projection TV and, on it, I would freeze-frame a real weather map at which to gesture. I pointed my home video camera at this and at me, standing there in my little suit and tie, feeling for all the world like the Son of Bozo. The tapes, I never watched and I still don't know why I needed the camera there but, trust me, I did. I delivered a couple of forecasts, reading off makeshift cue cards propped up on chairs and, since I hadn't the vaguest as to how good or bad I was, I concentrated just on bringing it all in at two minutes without sounding like a tobacco auctioneer. That was the toughest part of it, by far.

Then I had to decide what to wear. The station did their Chromakey in green so I selected my double-breasted blue blazer, a pale blue shirt, a red tie and tan slacks. I selected these mainly because they were my only sport coat, my only dress shirt, my only tie and my only dress slacks. To the umpteen reasons I already had to not take the job, I could add having to buy more ties and learn to tie them. The red tie was a clip-on.

The night before the audition, I allowed myself the luxury of fantasizing about being brilliant, getting the job and going on from weathermanning, as did Pat Sajak and David Letterman (to name two) to Bigger Things. No matter how I put the vision together in my head, I didn't look too happy and I sure didn't look like I belonged.

Which is pretty much how I felt, the next day at the studio. The whole thing happened so quickly that my main memory of the day is of worrying that it would be noticed that my tie clipped-on. At 11 A.M., still at home, I phoned up the contact at the Weather Bureau and got all the pertinent data for a very boring, weather-wise, day. At 1:00, sitting in my blazer and clip-on, I was in a room with five other auditioners, every one of whom looked like they belonged on a TV newscast and every one of whom, I think, routinely could be found on one. One fellow had flown in from Colorado for this. None of them seemed to be from the comedy club circuit.

We drew cards to see who would go in what order and I won, whereupon Colorado asked if I would swap with him since he had to catch a plane to do the 6:00 news back home. I said that was fine with me and sat back to wait. We were not allowed to see the other auditioners auditioning.

A little after 2:30, I was ushered into the studio where one of the local newsmen was playing the part of "anchor." I was given a few minutes to play in the Chromakey and to read my notes which had been transferred to one of the station TelePrompters. Then I was on.

The newsman did the last few lines of a story about the demolition of a Hollywood landmark, then turned to me and mispronounced Evanier handily. I reached into the vast storehouse of Trivia that I pass off as a brain and added a few quick facts about the Walk of Fame, then stepped gingerly into two minutes of explaining that tomorrow would be exactly the same as today and that the day after would probably be exactly the same, too. I delivered a mention of a mythical bake sale out in La Habra, then recapped the forecast, finishing precisely as the Stage Manager signaled the end of the two minutes. The newsman turned to me and said he was off for a week of R-and-R in Washington, D.C.; how will the weather be back there?

I had no idea but, hey, this wasn't being broadcast. I said that there was a major cold snap engulfing our nation's capital. "In fact,

there are even Congressmen with their hands in their own pockets." The crew tittered and the Director, over the loudspeaker, could be heard to say, "...and *out*. Very nice, Mark. Very professional. You want to do another one?"

It hadn't dawned on me I would get two shots at it. I shrugged and said, "I'm sorry but that's as good as I get."

The Director thanked me and I tried to hurry from the set. And I would have made it, too, had not the microphone still been clipped to my clip-on tie and jerked me back. As the Stage Manager freed me, he said, "The guy before you did eight takes." I gathered he was complimenting me on my guts. Actually, I just had a tremendous need to get out of there. I went into the Men's Room, put on the street clothes I'd brought, wiped off the make-up they'd slapped on me and left. Quickly.

I still can't explain fully, my feelings of that afternoon. I know I sure felt like I was doing something I shouldn't be doing; that even though none of my anticipated disasters had occurred, that *"I shouldn't be here"* feeling was unmistakably present from the moment I walked in until I was back in my jeans. The closest I can come to describing the feeling is this: In the last few years, we've had a flurry of "body-change" movies in which, through some strained machination, a nine-year-old boy winds up in the carcass of an adult, passing for one. In every one of those movies, there's a scene in which the kid is in a serious business meeting with all these adults in suits and real ties, adults who belong in the meeting, know what they're doing. And the kid is fumbling about, acting like he belongs, hoping no one will get hip to the fact that though he looks grown-up, he's really nine years old.

That's how I felt: I was afraid they'd figure out I was nine.

I went home, called Hi and thanked him, told him I hoped I hadn't embarrassed him, and then forgot forever about my career as a TV weatherman.

Three days later, my writing agent called me in a state of utter bewilderment: He had just gotten a call from someone who wanted to discuss a contract for me to be the weekend weatherman on the local news. I hadn't told him a thing about it. I hadn't told *anyone* about it; my closest friends will find out when they read this. "I told them they had the wrong guy," my agent continued. "They insist you're their guy." I was starting to tell him the story when a Call Waiting beep interrupted us, I put him on hold and discovered the News Director of the station calling me on the other line.

"I just wanted to welcome you to our little family here," he said. "I was very impressed with your audition tape."

I started to tell him I didn't think I wanted the post but I couldn't figure how. He said, "After your guy gets your deal straight, give me a jingle. We'll work out when you start and we'll grab a bite and discuss how to goose the broadcast a bit."

I stammered out my thanks and returned to my agent waiting on hold, fascinated to hear how I'd gotten myself into *this* fine mess. I told him the whole story and, at its close, he asked me the question I had never expected: "Do you want the job?"

I answered, "No. I guess I wanted to know I could do it if I wanted to."

"Well, at least now you know," he said.

I responded, "No, I really don't. I still think that if they put me on the air, I'd start making Shemp Howard noises and just stammer for two minutes exactly. Listen, would you call them and tell them...something? *Anything?*"

"You have any suggestions?"

I said, "Tell them a pilot I wrote just got picked up. Tell them I'm sorry I wasted their time and tape but I'm obligated to the other project."

I could hear my agent shaking his head. "Okay. If you're sure this is how you want it."

"I'm sure."

"You want to think about this for a day or two? I can put them off, not return their calls. I don't want you to call me next week and say you wished you'd taken it."

"I won't," I said. And I didn't. Nor have I had any such wishes since.

I called Hi and thanked him again. I don't think he understood why I didn't want the job but he did accept that I was serious and he didn't try to talk me into it. Two weeks later, he called to tell me that no one had gotten the job yet; that they had sent the talent scout back to make the rounds of the night clubs again. Eventually, they found someone who was good at the job and, more important, wanted it.

That's really the end of the story except to say that my writing career has since paid for a real, non-porous roof and for repairs on all the destruction wrought by its predecessor. The new roof doesn't leak at all and that's a good thing. Because, although Hi said it wasn't going to rain tonight and the weathermen on the other channels all said no rain, and the National Weather Service said no rain, and the private services I can still access by computer all said no rain, since I started writing this, clouds have rolled in from the Northwest and darned if it isn't pouring outside my window.

And for the first time in a long while, since the first roof began playing Water-Pik, I'm not unhappy it's raining. Actually, I'm just delighted that I don't have to drive home from a studio in it and then go in tomorrow and explain to all of Los Angeles why I said it would be partly cloudy with low humidity.

— Mark Evanier

NEXT MONTH: